

By Bill Lambrecht, Post-Dispatch Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — **Rep. Russ Carnahan**, D-St. Louis, said today that the big bankruptcy today would lead to a “stronger, leaner Chrysler.”

He hopes. He hopes, too, that the Fenton plant is part of the future of the new Chrysler-Fiat merger taking place.

“This is going to be prime time to make the business case for the Fenton plant and its capabilities,” Carnahan told us a few minutes ago.

Carnahan, who had the benefit of a briefing today from the president’s **Auto Task Force**, described a fluid situation in coming weeks. Decisions that he described as fundamental to the new company’s future will be made by joint leadership of the two companies, and those leaders must be impressed with the Fenton plant and the St. Louis region.

What’s the case to be made? “There’s a half-billion-dollar investment there with flexible manufacturing. They can build virtually any car there, including to European standards. And they have an award-winning workforce ... I think we can compare our plant and our workforce to anyone’s,” he said.

Carnahan said that local leaders, **Gov. Jay Nixon’s** state task force and Missouri’s congressional delegation must work together in this sales job and get to it quickly.

Carnahan spoke of the recent negotiations leading up to the bankruptcy, calling it “absolutely remarkable that they got **Chrysler** and **Fiat** together, worked through an agreement with 70 percent of the debtors, the labor unions, the retirees ... But they had these hedge funds that were trying to hold them up.”

“We’re at a really critical time,” he said, adding that “it’s great to have the president up there encouraging people to buy American cars.”

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